MIRRORING REALITY

AMANDA BOUCHENOIRE

PHOTOGRAPHIC WORK

E. B. LEIBOVICI

PUBLICATIONS ÉDITORIALES I. E. SCHER
COLLECTION DES ESSAIS SÉLECTIONNÉS

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, photography as an art form is an undeniable fact. A photographic camera is an indispensable instrument for artistic production, as are the spatula and the brush, the pencil and charcoal, the chisel and the hammer.

At the present time we can see with all certainty how photography has been inserted into the artistic system and how possible it is to express ideas, emotions and points of view through the lens of the camera.

This clarification is pertinent given the aftereffects around the legitimacy of photography for the generation of artistic products. Such remnants, I am confident that they are currently few, are based on ignorance of the advancement that the photographic technique has had since it has been used as a scientific aid to other artistic disciplines such as painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.

The progress of photography, from the merely technical to the artistic field, began from its very origin by becoming the counterpart of a necessary dialogue between itself and painting, whose development was greatly influenced by photographic technique, such as Peter Henry Emerson stated it at the time:

> The influence of photography on painting, on the other hand, has been nothing more than wonderful, as can be seen in the great general improvements in the strokes of the movements. It is common practice for painters to take photographs of their models

> and place enlargements of them on a screen when the outlines are boldly sketched. (Emerson, 1890, p. 6)[1]

Since its origin, well into the eighteenth century, and with the international diffusion of the daguerreotype -the original procedure of the technique- two visions about photography have coexisted: that of technical expertise, on the one hand, and that of the ability to generate images that glimpse other perspectives of reality. And, given the current conditions in the artistic system in which contemporaneity demands a clear conceptualization, assuming mastery of technique, the union of both visions is essential to make the creation of an artistic work feasible.

Of course, the set of a refined photographic technique and the approach of some aesthetic category, together with the intention of activating reflective processes in the psyche of the viewer, makes it possible for the

[1] Emerson, Peter Henry (1890). *Naturalistic photograpy for students of the art*. 2nd edition. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivingstone Limited. London, p. 6

viewer to observe and analyze the images around him, and facilitates the approach of existential issues.

In this way, what is important in photography, as in all manifestations of art, is conceptual clarity and coherence between the elements that compose it and the idea that it intends to communicate.

This vision of photography has been more defined since the turbulent 1960s when artists became increasingly interested in the conceptual and content quality over the material creation of their work. Such definition has been influenced by the theory of art that began to emerge in the twentieth century around artistic production, distribution and aesthetic consumption. Juan Acha Valdivieso makes it clear, in his Crítica de arte: "(…) works of art are not worth what they say, but because of what they mean; they tread translinguistic and transemiotic terrain, obviously in

search of the ineffable. This rule opens the artistic path to aesthetic consumption". (Valdivieso, 2004, p. 39)[2]

This premise was adhered to by artists in the second half of the twentieth century, including photographers whose practice has been imbued with the artistic spirit since the advent of their own technology, and adherence to this premise becomes more evident with the advent of the twenty first century.

And it is precisely in the current century that the artistic practice of Amanda Bouchenoire, a transhumant photographer and painter whose work has been exhibited in France, Germany and Mexico, concurs.

Her work as a photojournalist and documentary maker around the world (Germany, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, Crete, Spain, United States of America, France, Greece, Holland, Italy, Morocco, Norway, United Kingdom, Switzerland, French Polynesia (Tahiti), Sardinia, Japan,

[2] Acha Valdivieso, Juan (1992, reprint 2004). *Crítica de arte. Teoría y práctica*. México. Editorial Trillas, ISBN 968-24-4416-0, p. 39

Czech Republic, Tunisia, and Mexico) is currently summarized in an artistic work where the main idea of her proposals lies in the boundary and the attributes of the borders. The synthesis is not free. The migratory nature of her life has influenced this conceptual path: the otherness reflected in pools of water or in the glass of showcases and windows is the common denominator in the artistic pieces that the author, originally from Montpellier, France, glimpses with the complicity of her lens. In doing so, she positions herself as an observer of a duality, a double vision that occurs from tangible events originating in a physical reality and becomes a reflection that represents possible alterities with a symbolic charge that can be interpreted in one or more ways, according to the aesthetic experience of the viewer.

Mirroring reality. Amanda Bouchenoire. Photographic work is thus a short essay on Amanda Bouchenoire's recent photographic work and the life experiences that drive her conceptualization.

TRANSHUMANCE

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!

Le Voyage, Fleurs du mal.
Charles Baudelaire.

Traveling, moving in search of other experiences, of new and strange ways of seeing and feeling other cultures, other ways of thinking… diving into otherness; this has been a constant in the life experience of Amanda Bouchenoire, whose circumstances have led her, along with her camera, to visit different continents.

From her early years she got used to the wandering life: Amanda relates that since childhood, to attend school she had to travel by cable car (alone, in a small cabin), and she perfectly remembers the route up and down the mountain, the pines and the shapes of their branches, and the pedestrian reliefs that characterize the snow-covered landscape that he traveled daily and that made him intuit what was the source of inspiration for works of art by the masters of painting that he would later know in her visits to European museums.

The illuminated environment of the snow-capped mountains of El Jura, with their lakes, rivers, mountains and valleys that combine to draw a panorama of profound beauty was the main source of inspiration to, from the age of six, begin to photograph the natural life that was exuberant before her gaze and that Amanda could observe in a privileged way: the glitters and sparkles of dawn, the cloudy and rainy days, the changes of season, the sunsets and the nights.

With that cultural background, and permeated by a taste for observing nature, she began to travel constantly in the interior of France and in several countries of the European Union, in addition to Japan, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Cuba and Tahiti. In the European Union, she worked as a press photographer for the newspaper Midi Libre (France) and at the Mexican Embassy in Germany (Berlin).

In this going from here to there, Amanda's artistic career has been enriched with a photographic practice that has resulted in more than 15 exhibitions of her work, in France, Germany and Mexico, the latter, the country of her current residence. Transhumance has also been a conceptual support for the theme of her photographic work, since, in an abstract way, she alludes to invisible borders that unify both parts of a dual reality: the tangible and the reflected.

The migratory profile of Amanda Bouchenoire reminds us of the photographers who chose Mexico as their country of residence, Tina

Modotti and Mariana Yampolsky among them, who captured fascinated Mexican peoples.

They were preceded by a generation of female photographers who arrived in Mexico since the mid-nineteenth century, and who found in the country a great source of inspiration for their artistic work; among which we find the German Caecilie Selen, the English Alice Le Plongeon, the American Laura Gilpin, the Polish-American Bernice Kolko and the Franco-German Gisèle Freund, among others. (Debroise, 2001)[3]

Whether it was due to personal tastes, artistic preferences, or as part of an institutional project, the artists who preceded Amanda addressed themes that made reference to the pre and post revolutionary identity of the country and its different regions. Bouchenoire's work, however, is marked by contemporaneity, one in which places (in the anthropological

[3] Debroise, Olivier Debroise (2001). *Mexican Suite: A History of Photography in Mexico*. University of Texas Press, 1ª edición. U.S.A., ISBN: 978-02-92716-11-7

sense) have not been forgotten but have been overtaken by modernity, or their signs of identity have been blurred by nature, itself.

Thus, in Amanda's work, we have subtle references to the defining transience of spaces, to non-places, as defined by Marc Augé and in which it is possible to identify universally due to the lack or total lack of cultural impositions and in whose immersion is always desirable: “to rediscover the non-place of space, a little later, to escape the totalitarian constraint of the place, will undoubtedly be to find something that resembles freedom.” (Augé, 1993, p. 119)[4]

And so we see that the transhumance of Amanda Bouchenoire defines the *how* of her photographic practice and that the appropriation of non-places is incidental but thoughtful. She chooses the scenes from the streets that she likes to prowl in search of objectives that captivate her. Her practice is, therefore, an eternal movement between streets, sidewalks and

[4] Augé, Marc (1983). *Los no lugares. Espacios del anonimato. Antropología de la Sobremodernidad*. Editorial Gedisa. España, ISBN: 978-84-7432-459-9, p. 119

the search for transparent and reflective surfaces, attributes that allow her to develop a narrative around the double vision: tangible and imaginary reality.

REFLECTIONS

"And there were also somber glows and darkenings, as if a cuttlefish were suddenly turning the air purple; and the room had its passions and fury and envy and sorrow, which stalked and covered her, like a human being. Nothing stayed the same for more than two seconds… But outside, the mirror reflected the lobby table, the sunflowers and the garden so clearly and so intently that they seemed hopelessly trapped in their own reality."

Woman in the Mirror: Reflections
Virginia Wolff.

The delicate and elegant pen of the London writer enunciated in this way that strange charm that the phenomenon of reflections produces in us; it´s a seductive attraction that has also fascinated artists for centuries.

And it is easy to imagine the fascination of Amanda Bouchenoire as she wanders through cities around the world, walking their sidewalks with the strap over her shoulder, carrying a camera that eagerly sways, waiting to capture targets. In front of it, showcases that display hundreds of objects that seduce eager patrons avidly seek to fulfill their role in the game of supply and demand.

Amanda doesn't aspire to get involved in that consumer dynamic, in any way. Like a contemporary voyeurist, she lets herself be captivated by the meta visions to which the crystals invite her; she is enraptured while

her gaze jumps from one thing to the other, in infinite visuals where everything stops breathing and remains motionless in the ecstasy of immortality.

Her attitude towards the reflections that she discovers while wandering is the result of a natural curiosity, an inquiring concern that the French photographer acquired in her childhood in her direct coexistence with nature: in the Jura mountains, during winter, and between lakes and countryside, during the summer. This natural environment favored the isolation of Amanda and offered her ample moments of solitude that influenced her taste for close observation of her surroundings, and in the development of an acute perception for the understanding of natural patterns.

From that isolation in solitude that leads to reflection, the theme in Amanda's photographic work becomes. A work in which the fascination for the other realities that are shown to us in the reflections induces in us, the viewers of her photographic work, the desire to embrace those

moments that are eternalized by Amanda's gaze, first, and by the lens from her camera, later.

Her photographic work refers us to the enchantment produced by reflections in surrealist Alice:

> (…) There is the room that you see on the other side of the mirror and that is completely the same as our living room, only with all the things arranged in reverse ... their books look like ours, but they have the words written backwards: and I know that because once I put one of ours before the mirror and then those in the other room showed me one of theirs. (Carroll, 2018, p. 11)[5]

And as in the literature of Lewis Caroll, also a photographer, in the work of Amanda Bouchenoire we perceive surrealist overtones when we peek into her images and discover that these dreamlike refer us to the desire to be in other places, to migrate with our imagination towards

[5] Carroll, Lewis (2018). *A través del espejo y lo que Alicia encontró allí*. Editorial Austral. España, ISBN: 978-84-08184-22-5, p. 11

otherness reflected in the glass or in the water puddles, another of the reflective media that the French photographer has found to be optimal to invite us to travel from the simplicity of a shiny surface towards the utopian worlds that sublimate our realities, even if it is for a few moments.

And from those sublimated realities, Amanda guides us on a walk between the private that is exhibited inside a showcase (the objects of desire) and the public (the space in which we travel and from which the urgency for possession is born and the enjoyment of those objects). The facades of the buildings and the cloudy sky anchor their images and outline baroque or neoclassical landscapes whose verticality blends with the mannequins dressed in the latest fashion and covered in gold or red costumes. The architectural structures are joined by the perfumery containers, the toy store that reminds us of our early childhood, the circular lights arranged for our gazes; ourselves who circulate between the same streets that Amanda travels during her photographic days.

Thus, Amanda invites us to reflect on the transparent borders that blur the boundaries between inside and outside while integrating them into lively compositions that orbit intermittently between the photographed objectives and our perception.

The incidental is also present in her photographs: the author generates analogies with the objet trouvé by collecting scenes arranged for observation, in an exercise of visual appropriation of reality; a sort of scène trouvée, by way of artistic serendipity that happens fortunately by dint of walking through the public spaces of the cities visited by Amanda.

And by capturing these found scenes, Amanda addresses the sublime as an aesthetic category; invites us to enjoy possible realities where borders are demarcated with our ability to imagine.

WORK

During the last fifteen years, Amanda Bouchenoire's nomadism has allowed her to undertake photographic workshops that have aroused her interest in various subjects.

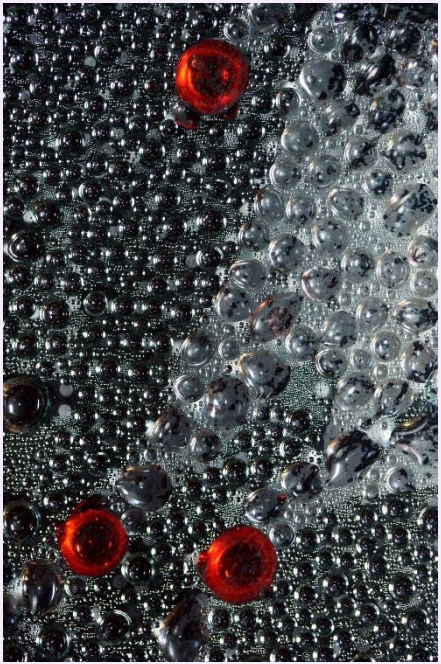
The reflections with which she explores various conceptual approaches stand out in her portfolio: borders, the tangible (real) and the imagined (virtual), the unified dualities, as well as the reflection on the natural aesthetics of landscapes and flora, among others.

For this essay, *Mirroring reality. Amanda Bouchenoire. Photographic work*, it is pertinent to present, on the following pages, a selection of

images -as a brief catalog- that illustrate the considerations expressed in these pages.

They´re images captured in different parts of the world and that have been part of some of the samples of her photographic work made in Germany, France, and Mexico; the selection corresponds to themes that were curatorially argued by four exhibitions with the artistic work of Amanda Bouchenoire: Drops of water, Puddles of light, Reflet-xions, and Double vision.

In a general way, in the images that illustrate this essay we can identify some technical characteristics that enhance Amanda's practice: neatness, adequate exposure, elegant compositions and, in a very special way, *timing*, taking into account that her photographs have been taken without a previous production.

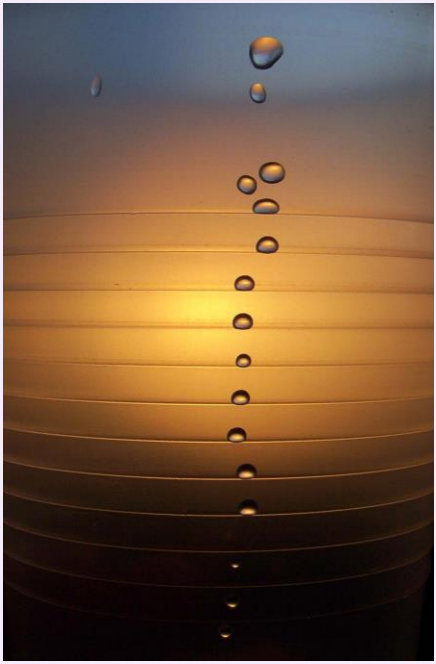


Gouttes de larmes rouges

San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico.

2005

With a dynamic and rhythmic construction configured from drops of water, Amanda generates in *Gouttes de larmes rouges* a metaphor of tears in which the red-black-gray contrast conceptually defines the piece, adding emotional tints with that corresponding chromatic game to the title of this piece.



Soleil voilé

San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico.
2005

The sunset that darkens *peu à peu* to the natural rhythm of the day, is emphasized by the natural cadence of the falling drops of water, while a soft contrast, between the gold of the center and the blue of the upper part, emphasizes this lucky moment captured by Amanda.

Gouttes d'automne. Germany, 2009.

The peace and quiet after the rain is a suggestion of this shot that moves away from mere scientific observation to offer a colorful moment in which the precise handling of the shutter with the autumn light and the surface on the surface converge alchemically, on which the drops of water settle, in this image exhibited in the *Gouttes d'eau* exhibition.

Thalassa

Spain, 2013.

The puddles of water become spontaneous collaborators in a photographic practice that becomes pictorialism.

The undulations configure involuntary and bright brushstrokes that plastically enrich this abstract, naturally harmonious composition, part of the work exhibited in the *Reflet-xions* exhibition, (Noymann Miller Gallery / Zig Zag Jazz Club. Berlin, Germany, 2013)

Sources. Germany, 2013.

With *Sources*, Amanda manages to capture an image with a certain plastic eloquence that allows us to contemplate diaphanous attributes in a reflection that reflects a consolidated reality in the world of the tangible and also translates into virtuality, like a fleeting aesthetic moment.

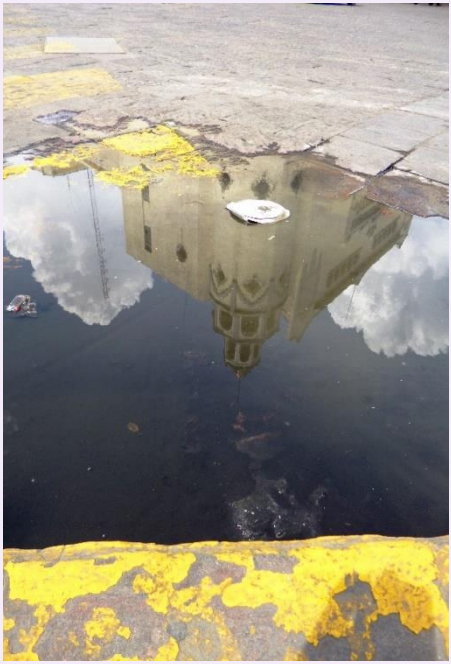
Glaucus. Netherlands, 2013.

A certain impressionist air appropriates this reflection with a color palette that ranges from dark and brown to gray and white, passing through red and sea green that gives this piece a certain personality, also part of the *Reflet-xions* exhibition. (Noymann Miller Gallery / Zig Zag Jazz Club. Berlin, Germany, 2013).

Flaque of Alameda

San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico.

2018.



The reflection is the main focus of this shot that integrates the architecture of the Cineteca Alameda bordered by a leaden sky and two round white puffy clouds.

The composition is complemented by the grayness of the paving stones in the upper part and the contrast with the yellow-gray element in the lower part

Flaque of Cholula

Cholula, Puebla, 2015.

The Churrigueresque style of the tower of the Parroquia San Pedro -the highest in the city- is the main focus of this reflection in the puddle of its main square.

The inverted verticality is surrounded by a calm sky that supports the clarity of the scene, delimited by the edges of the puddle and complemented by the grayish grid of the cobblestone.

Flaque of terreur

Germany, 2015.

The humid and calm light in the center of the composition, limited by the play of diagonal and reticular lines of the floor that surrounds it, plays a leading role in this moment captured by Amanda Bouchenoire in which it refers us to a Gothic environment.

A deep contrast adds drama to the scene depicted in this piece.

En voiture poupée

Vienna, Austria, 2014.

The baroque spirit of the background architecture and the object set of the showcase are integrated in communion with the softness of the blue sky and its clouds to enrich the composition of this piece.
They are scenes that make evident the limits between what is public and what is private, between supply and consumption - the desire for possession.

Boules surprises

Vienna, Austria, 2014.

Amanda captures a contrast between the static and the dynamic, in this piece that is part of the Double Vision series presented at the Site Museum (Centro de las Artes de San Luis Potosí, Centenario. San Luis Potosí, SLP., Mexico. 2020).
The ascending and sober symmetry of a frugal façade - and its own contrast between the stone and the glass of its windows - warmly welcomes the rhythmic movement of the gift spheres.

Ballons magiques

Germany, 2014.

The light reverberation that captivates our eyes turns into a festive scene as a result of a multiplier effect generated in the interiors of the showcase.

The composition is strengthened by the vertical rhythm of the sets of magic balls and their colors that align with the architectural austerity, and contrast with the monochrome of the facade and the square shapes of the windows.

BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Bouchenoire was born on March 17, 1977, in Montpellier, France. Since the age of six, she has practiced photography, an activity that has defined her professional activity around the world. As a visual artist she has developed her artistic work in the fields of painting, journalistic, documentary and artistic photography.

She studied photography at the *Center National D'Enseignement à Distance*, in France and has developed in the field of journalistic photography in media such as Midi Libre (France) and at the Embassy of Mexico in Germany (Berlin).

She has developed her artistic work around the world, in places like Germany, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, Crete, Spain, United States of America, France, Greece, Holland, Italy, Morocco, Norway, United Kingdom, Switzerland, French Polynesia (Tahiti), Sardinia, Japan, Czech Republic, Tunisia, and Mexico.

Since 2005 she has lived in the city of San Luis Potosí, and since then she has held 15 individual exhibitions of her artistic work in museums and galleries in Germany, France and Mexico, including:

Gotas de agua, (50th Anniversary of the Centro de Difusión Cultural del Instituto Potosino de Bellas Artes. San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, May-June, 2005).

Superficies extrañas: Piedras, (Museo Regional Potosino del Instituto National de Antropología e Historia, San Luis Potosí, SLP., Mexico, March-May, 2006).

Flores, (Centro de Difusión Cultural del Instituto Potosino de Bellas Artes. San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, December 2006 – January 2007)

Superficies extrañas: Metal, (Cassan Abbey. Cassan, France, July-August, 2011).

El cielo sobre Berlín; (Kleisther Café Gallery. Berlin, Germany, October 2011 – March 2012).

Reflet-xions, (Noymann Miller Gallery / Zig Zag Jazz Club. Berlin, Germany, February-April, 2013).

Miradas, (Museo Nacional de la Máscara. San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, February-March, 2016).

La hormiga kamikase. (Centro de Difusión Cultural del Instituto Potosino de Bellas Artes. San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, March-April, 2016).

La Torre Eiffel, (The Alianza Francesa Artists Gallery, San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, November-December, 2016).

Charcos de luz, (Teatro de la Paz, San Luis Potosí, SLP., Mexico, February- April, 2018).

Nubes Nuages, (Piece of the month in the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo. San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, March – May, 2019).

Estructuras destructuradas, (Museo Regional Potosino del Instituto National de Antropología e Historia, San Luis Potosí, SLP., Mexico, March – May, 2019).

Doble visión, (Museo de Sitio del Centro de las Artes de San Luis Potosí Centenario. San Luis Potosí, SLP. Mexico, March – October, 2020).

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